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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BELGRADE 001632

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KV](#) [SR](#)  
SUBJECT: SERBIA PREPARES FOR PEACEFUL RETALIATION TO KOSOVO  
INDEPENDENCE

Classified By: Ambassador Cameron Munter, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

Summary

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11. (C) In the event of a declaration of independence, the Government of Serbia will retaliate against Kosovo and against countries that recognize an independent Kosovo. But Serbia will not wage war. The Prime Minister's cabinet has prepared contingency plans, for now under wraps, detailing the government's response, ministry by ministry. Retaliation against the United States and Europe will almost certainly fall short of a break in relations. Retaliation against Kosovo will almost certainly include closing borders to commerce and travel and encumbering official communication between Belgrade and Pristina. Belgrade could disrupt transmission of power and water to Kosovo, and we must continue to discourage them from exercising this capability. Keeping Serbs safely in Kosovo remains an official priority. Attempts to change borders in southern Serbia or foment secession there would trigger a stronger GOS reaction. The rhetoric, which will grow shriller in the weeks ahead, represents Belgrade's efforts to convince the domestic audience it is holding the line on Kosovo. It is not a call to arms. End Summary.

Declaring the Declaration Illegal

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12. (C) The Government of Serbia will retaliate in the event of a unilateral or coordinated declaration of independence (CDI), invoking legal arguments to justify its actions. Serbian officials have preemptively stated that a unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) in Kosovo will be illegitimate and that any foreign country to recognize Kosovo would violate Serbia's sovereignty. In the event of a declaration of independence, the Serbian parliament is expected to annul the declaration and pronounce it an illegal act on Serbian territory. Government officials have told us that the Serbia will also formally demand that the UN Secretary General and UNMIK repudiate the declaration as a violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1244.

The Diplomatic Response to Recognition

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13. (C) The Prime Minister's Cabinet has submitted ministry action plans for responses to Kosovo independence. On December 4, Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic Foreign Minister Jeremic spoke to the media about the MFA's plan. Jeremic described a scale of diplomatic responses, with rupture of diplomatic relations representing the harshest response, reserved, we believe, for unilateral recognition of a UDI. MFA Political Director Stefanovic, in a private meeting with poloff on December 5 said that the plan was descriptive, not prescriptive. Stefanovic suggested that said that Serbia would withdraw, if temporarily, ambassadors from countries which recognize Kosovo. If the United States unilaterally recognized Kosovo, following a unilateral declaration of independence (UDI), Serbia might sever relations with the United States. If the USG acted in concert with Europe, he said, this would not happen.

Trade Restrictions

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¶4. (SBU) Government officials have stated that Serbia will employ all means legally available, short of military action, in retaliation against a break-away Kosovo. An advisor to FM Jeremic told poloff, on November 27, that Serbia would close the border to Kosovo trade and travel in the event of a declaration of independence. Stefanovic said Serbia would not recognize import/export certificates, passports, or any other documents from a Kosovo state. To observations that Serbian business and Serbs in Kosovo would suffer most severely from such acts, Stefanovic and others acknowledge that the actual interruption of the flow of goods to Kosovo would be brief. While Serbia would maintain trade restrictions, informal "transfers," black marketeering, and commerce via Macedonia would supply Kosovo.

#### Interfering with Infrastructure

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¶5. (C) It is conceivable that, following a CDI, the GOS might claim an absence of legal authority in Kosovo, declare infrastructure agreements with UNMIK void, and at least temporarily disrupt the flow of water and power to Kosovo. We have strongly discouraged such acts, pointing out that they could be interpreted as attacks against innocents. Where basic humanitarian arguments have had little traction, we have also pointed out that such acts would undermine President Tadic's stated objective of preventing an exodus of Serbs from Kosovo. While Serbia might be able to insulate northern Mitrovice from such punishing acts, we noted, reaching Serb enclaves and Serbs in the Kosovo countryside would be problematic.

#### Preparing the Public to Lose Kosovo Not an Option

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¶6. (C) Serbia's leaders oppose Kosovo independence, privately and publicly, regardless the inevitability of that outcome, and will continue to beat the drum for territorial integrity. With presidential elections anticipated in early 2008, officials from both President Tadic (DS) and Prime Minister Kostunica's (DSS) parties have told us that they need to prevent the loss of Kosovo from leading to loss of Serbian democracy and a Radical win at the polls. Political analysts do not expect Tadic to pull off a first-round victory, but currently have him running slightly ahead of Radical Party leader Nikolic in the second round.

¶7. (U) The Government of Serbia has launched several media campaigns to show Serbians that it is battling to keep Kosovo. In November, a GOS-funded organization erected billboards throughout Belgrade featuring Serbian celebrities urging Serbians to remember the "suffering" of Kosovo Serbs. In December, the Kosovo Ministry put up a billboards depicting historic Western leaders (including Churchill and U.S. Presidents Washington, Kennedy, and Lincoln) and citing their challenges to their fellow citizens to stand up for their principals and beliefs. The message that Kosovo is and must stay part of Serbia, blazoned on billboards across the city and in televised public service messages, reflects the people's will, but perhaps not their expectation. We believe most Serbs know what is coming, even if they don't like it.

#### Losing Kosovo: Blaming the West

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¶8. (C) Serbian leaders will denounce all countries that recognize Kosovo's independence, but will lay most of the blame on the United States. On November 28, the Prime Minister's Advisor Sestovic told poloff that Serbs consider Kosovo independence the conclusion of "NATO's war on Serbia," for which they particularly blame the United States. He said he expected Serbian politicians and media explain the loss of Kosovo as a "great injustice" perpetrated by the U.S.-led international community. We expect that much of the public will accept the premise of this anti-American rhetoric and demonstrate, albeit peacefully, against the United States and international community.

## Maintaining Peace

¶9. (C) Serbia's leaders, including the President, Prime Minister, and Minister of Defense, have assured the Ambassador they will not send Serbia's military into Kosovo and will not wage war. They underscore, however, Serbia's right and responsibility to defend against violence within its borders, and we expect they will particularly monitor activities in Serbia's Albanian communities of the Presevo Valley. In a December 6 meeting with the Ambassador and visiting EUCOM General Gallagher, President Tadic said that avoiding violence in Kosovo and the exodus of "100,000 Serbs" will require close contact and daily communication between the United States and Serbia's security and defense institutions. He reiterated his appreciation of U.S. assistance in apprehending criminal Kosovo gangs organizing armed militias in Macedonia.

Comment: Red Lines

¶10. (C) Serbia will not be Kosovo's good neighbor for the foreseeable future unless Serbia's population and politicians and Serbia's leaders must and will protest this outcome to years of negotiations with political and economic means at their disposal. The ministries' action plans undoubtedly identify numerous trip wires that will trigger measured government responses. Elements of the government may cause and condone mischief -- both in the interval leading to a declaration of Kosovo independence and beyond. The Government will not wreak havoc or incite sustained violence.

¶11. (C) Our task is to develop our own clear red lines, and to present them, in concert with our allies, to the Serbs once the December UN process has concluded.

MUNTER